The Subjunctive Mood – Ancient Greek for Everyone

Inscribed votive stele for the hero Kallistephanos, with a scene from the workshop of a cobbler, Dionysios. 4th c. B.C. Athenian Agora Excavations.

The Subjunctive Mood

We have already learned three moods of Greek verbs: the indicative, infinitive, and the imperative.

- The INDICATIVE mood indicates FACTS about actions or states.
- The INFINITIVE mood is a VERBAL NOUN.
- The IMPERATIVE mood is used to give COMMANDS.

In this lesson, we introduce another mood: the SUBJUNCTIVE.

The subjunctive mood primarily refers to HYPOTHETICAL actions in the PRESENT or FUTURE, i.e., in the same time covered by the PRIMARY tenses of verbs. There are only three tenses of the subjunctive, each of which express ASPECT, not time:

- present
- aorist
- perfect

Since the SUBJUNCTIVE mood always refers to hypothetical events, it NEVER has an augment.

The Subjunctive Mood: Personal Endings

ALL verbs in Greek use exactly the same personal endings to mark the subjunctive mood. These personal endings are THEMATIC PRIMARY endings, though with the thematic vowel lengthened (ω/η) (S 457).

For the ACTIVE voice, the subjunctive personal endings are as follows:

(-ω →) –ω = I (1st sg)	(-ομεν →) –ωμεν = we (1st pl)
(-εις →) –ῃς = you (2nd sg)	(-ετε →) –ητε = y’all (2nd pl)
(-ει →) –ῃ = (s)he, it (3rd sg)	(-ουσι →) –ωσι = they (3rd pl)

These personal endings are the same form as the PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE

ACTIVE of εἰμί. For this verb, note that:

- The present subjunctive of εἰμί is not enclitic.
- Accents and breathing marks are identical in all persons and numbers.

Present, Subjunctive, Active of εἰμί (S 768; GPH p. 179)

ὦ ὦμεν
ᾖς ἦτε
ᾖ ὦσι

For the MIDDLE voice, the subjunctive personal endings are as follows:

(-ομαι →) –ωμαι = I (1st sg)	(-ομεθα →) –ωμεθα = we (1st pl)
(-εσαι → –ησαι →) –ῃ = you (2nd sg)	(-εσθε →) –ησθε = y'all (2nd pl)
(-εται →) –ηται = (s)he, it (3rd sg)	(-ονται →) –ωνται = they (3rd pl)

The Subjunctive Mood: Formation

All three tenses of the subjunctive use the same set of THEMATIC endings. The tense of the subjunctive is indicated not by any additional markers or endings, but only by the TENSE STEM. To see how to form the subjunctive in its three tenses, let's take a look at these examples:

- λύω, λύσω, ἔλυσα, λέλυκα, λέλυμαι, ἐλύθην
- λαμβάνω, λήψομαι, ἔλαβον, εἴληφα, εἴλημμαι, ἐλήφθην
- δείκνυμι, δείξω, ἔδειξα, δέδειχα, δέδειγμαι, ἐδείχθην

Let's begin with this verb: λύω, λύσω, ἔλυσα, λέλυκα, λέλυμαι, ἐλύθην

- present tense stem: λυ–
- aorist tense stem: λυσ–
- perfect tense stem: λελυκ–

The Present Subjunctive Active of λύω (S 383; GPH p. 71)

λύω λύωμεν
λύῃς λύητε
λύῃ λύωσι

The Present Subjunctive Middle of λύω (S 383; GPH p. 71)

λύωμαι λυώμεθα
λύῃ λύησθε
λύηται λύωνται

The Aorist Subjunctive Active of λύω (S 383; GPH p. 79)

λύσω λύσωμεν
λύσῃς λύσητε
λύσῃ λύσωσι

The Aorist Subjunctive Middle of λύω (S 383; GPH p. 71)

λύσωμαι λυσώμεθα
λύσῃ λύσησθε
λύσηται λύσωνται

The Perfect Subjunctive Active of λύω (S 383; GPH p. 92)

λελύκω λελύκωμεν
λελύκῃς λελύκητε
λελύκῃ λελύκωσι

In the PERFECT tense, the forms of the SUBJUNCTIVE mood proved difficult for Greeks to say. Sometimes in the ACTIVE voice, and always in the MIDDLE voice, Greek used the following PERIPHRASTIC forms (S 599, 691):

- perfect active: PERFECT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE followed by the SUBJUNCTIVE form of εἰμί .
    - e.g. λελύκῃ or λελυκὼς ᾖ
- perfect middle: PERFECT MIDDLE PARTICIPLE followed by the SUBJUNCTIVE form of εἰμί .
    - e.g. λελυμένος ᾖ (never λελυ– + –ηται)

The Perfect, Subjunctive, Middle of λύω (GPH p. 92)

λελυμένος ὦ λελυμένοι ὦμεν
λελυμένος ᾖς λελυμένοι ἦτε
λελυμένος ᾖ λελυμένοι ὦσι

Now let’s take a look at this verb, in the active voice: λαμβάνω, λήψομαι, ἔλαβον, εἴληφα, εἴλημμαι, ἐλήφθην

- present tense stem: λαμβαν–
- aorist tense stem: λαβ–
- perfect tense stem: εἰληφ–

The Present Subjunctive Active of λαμβάνω

λαμβάνω λαμβάνωμεν
λαμβάνῃς λαμβάνητε
λαμβάνῃ λαμβάνωσι

The Aorist Subjunctive Active of λαμβάνω (S 384; GPH p. 84)

λάβω λάβωμεν
λάβῃς λάβητε
λάβῃ λάβωσι

The Perfect Subjunctive Active of λαμβάνω

εἰλήφω εἰλήφωμεν
εἰλήφῃς εἰλήφητε
εἰλήφῃ εἰλήφωσι

Finally, let’s take a look at this verb, in the active voice: δείκνυμι, δείξω, ἔδειξα, δέδειχα, δέδειγμαι, ἐδείχθην

- present tense stem: δεικνυ–
- aorist tense stem: δειξ–
- perfect tense stem: δεδειχ–

The Present, Subjunctive, Active of δείκνυμι (S 418; GPH p. 158)

δεικνύω δεικνύωμεν
δεικνύῃς δεικνύητε
δεικνύῃ δεικνύωσι

The Aorist, Subjunctive, Active of δείκνυμι

δείξω δείξωμεν
δείξῃς δείξητε
δείξῃ δείξωσι

The Perfect, Subjunctive, Active of δείκνυμι

δεδείχω δεδείχωμεν
δεδείχῃς δεδείχητε
δεδείχῃ δεδείχωσι

-μι Verbs

The verbs δίδωμι, ἵστημι, and τίθημι form the PRESENT and AORIST subjunctive by adding the lengthened thematic ending to the short vowel stem, which then contracts (S 749).

The Present, Subjunctive, Active of δίδωμι (S 416; GPH p. 125)

διδῶ διδῶμεν
διδῷς διδῶτε
διδῷ διδῶσι

The Aorist, Subjunctive, Active of δίδωμι (S 416; GPH p. 130)

δῶ δῶμεν
δῷς δῶτε
δῷ δῶσι

The Present, Subjunctive, Active of ἵστημι (S 416; GPH p. 136)

ἱστῶ ἱστῶμεν
ἱστῇς ἱστῆτε
ἱστῇ ἱστῶσι

The Second Aorist, Subjunctive, Active of ἵστημι (S 416; GPH p. 140)

στῶ στῶμεν
στῇς στῆτε
στῇ στῶσι

Recall that ἵστημι has both a SECOND and FIRST aorist to indicate INTRANSITIVE and TRANSITIVE use, respectively. The first aorist conjugates regularly:

The First Aorist, Subjunctive, Active of ἵστημι

στήσω στήσωμεν
στήσῃς στήσητε
στήσῃ στήσωσι

The Present, Subjunctive, Active of τίθημι (S 416; GPH p. 147)

τιθῶ	τιθῶμεν
τιθῇς	τιθῆτε
τιθῇ	τιθῶσι

The Aorist, Subjunctive, Active of τίθημι (S 416; GPH p. 152)

θῶ	θῶμεν
θῇς	θῆτε
θῇ	θῶσι

The Subjunctive Mood: Main Clause

As discussed above, the tenses of the subjunctive reflect ASPECT, not time. It may be of no surprise to learn that the PRESENT and AORIST are the most common tenses of the subjunctive that you will encounter. The PERFECT subjunctive appears rarely in Greek (S 691-693).

The Greek subjunctive is used both in MAIN CLAUSES (i.e., as the main verb) and SUBORDINATE CLAUSES. We discuss subordinate clauses in the next lesson. For now, less us look at the use of subjunctives as main verbs.

There are three uses of the subjunctive in main clauses:

- hortatory
- deliberative
- prohibitive

Hortatory Subjunctive

The HORTATORY subjunctive is used to convey an exhortation, proposal, or request (S 1797-1799). Common characteristics of the hortatory subjunctive are:

- It is used only in the PRESENT or AORIST tense
- It is used only in the 1st PERSON, almost always in the PLURAL
- The negative is μή

While hortatory subjunctives often express suggestions for action, in other contexts they may serve essentially as 1st person imperatives.

- μὴ παύωμεν τοὺς ἐκ τῆς μάχης φεύγοντας.
    - *Let's not stop the men fleeing from battle.*
- πόλεμον παύσωμεν.
    - *Let's stop the war.*
- τοὺς ἵππους λύσωμεν.
    - *Let's free the horses.*
- τοὺς ἵππους λύωμεν.
    - *Let's free the horses.*
- τοὺς ἵππους λαβώμεθα.
    - *Let's take the horses.*

Deliberative Subjunctive

The DELIBERATIVE subjunctive is used when a speaker is asking himself or herself a question about *what to do* or *what to say* (S 1805-1808). Common characteristics of the deliberative subjunctive are:

- It is used only in the PRESENT or AORIST tense
- It is used only in the 1st PERSON
- The negative is μή

DELIBERATIVE subjunctives are always found in QUESTIONS. This distinguishes them from HORTATORY subjunctives, which are statements.

- παύωμεν τοὺς ἐκ τῆς μάχης φεύγοντας;
    - *Shall we stop the men fleeing from battle?*
- πόλεμον παύσωμεν;
    - *Shall we stop the war?*
- τοὺς ἵππους λύσω;
    - *Shall I free the horses?*
- τοὺς ἵππους λύωμεν;
    - *Shall we free the horses?*
- τοὺς ἵππους λαβώμεθα;
    - *Shall we take the horses?*

Prohibitive Subjunctive

The PROHIBITIVE subjunctive is used to express prohibitions (S 1800). Common characteristics of the prohibitive subjunctive are:

- It is used only in the AORIST tense

- It is usually in the 2nd PERSON (rarely in the 3rd PERSON)
- It is always accompanied by the negative μή.

Since PROHIBITIVE subjunctives are always in the AORIST tense, they denote simple aspect. If the prohibition requires ongoing aspect, the present imperative is used.

- μὴ παύσητε τοὺς ἐκ τῆς μάχης φεύγοντας.
    - *Don't stop the men fleeing from battle.*
- πόλεμον μὴ παύσῃς.
    - *Don't stop the war.*
- τοὺς ἵππους μὴ λύσῃς.
    - *Don't free the horses.*
- τοὺς ἵππους μὴ λύετε.
    - *Don't free the horses.*
- τοὺς ἵππους μὴ λάβησθε.
    - *Don't take the horses.*

The Future Indicative vs. The Subjunctive Mood

Subjunctives, like imperatives, consider future actions. You may have noticed that the 1st person singular of the FIRST AORIST SUBJUNCTIVE ACTIVE is identical in form with the 1st person singular of the FUTURE INDICATIVE ACTIVE:

- λύσω
- δείξω
- στήσω

This is no coincidence. The form of the FUTURE INDICATIVE appears to have developed from the FIRST AORIST SUBJUNCTIVE. In fact, the future indicative and first aorist subjunctive have identical forms in some dialects and in Homer (S 532, 541). The Latin future indicative is also a development from the original Proto-Indo-European (PIE) subjunctive.

– τὸ τέλος –

Key Terms and Concepts

- SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD AND ASPECT
- HORTATORY SUBJUNCTIVE
- DELIBERATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE
- PROHIBITIVE SUBJUNCTIVE

Exercises

1. Conjugate the following verbs in the PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE ACTIVE.

- εἰμί, ἔσομαι
- δίδωμι, δώσω, ἔδωκα, δέδωκα, δέδομαι, ἐδόθην
- τίθημι, θήσω, ἔθηκα, τέθηκα, τέθειμαι, ἐτέθην

2. Conjugate the following verbs in the AORIST SUBJUNCTIVE ACTIVE.

- παύω, παύσω, ἔπαυσα, πέπαυκα, πέπαυμαι, ἐπαύθην
- γράφω, γράψω, ἔγραψα, γέγραφα, γέγραμμαι, ἐγράφην
- ποιέω, ποιήσω, ἐποίησα, πεποίηκα, πεποίημαι, ἐποιήθην

3. Conjugate the following verbs in the PERFECT SUBJUNCTIVE PASSIVE

- παύω, παύσω, ἔπαυσα, πέπαυκα, πέπαυμαι, ἐπαύθην

4. For each of the sentences below, a) identify the tense of the subjunctive; b) identify its use (hortatory, deliberative, or prohibitive); and c) translate.

- τὰ ζῷα θύωμεν;
- μὴ παύσητε τὴν μάχην.
- μὴ παύσωμεν τὴν μάχην.
- θύωμεν τὰ ζῷα.
- παύωμεν τὴν μάχην;
- τὰ χρήματα λάβω;
- μὴ παύσῃς τὴν μάχην.
- παύσω τὴν μάχην;
- τὰ χρήματα μὴ λάβησθε.
- τὰ χρήματα λάβω;

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